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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 002558

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/23/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: MFA CONFIRMS HAMAS ACCEPTANCE OF 24-HOUR CEASEFIRE

REF: TEL AVIV 2864

Classified By: ACTING MINISTER-COUNSELOR CATHERINE HILL HERNDON
REASONS: 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) MFA Deputy Director for Palestinian Affairs Barakat Leithy confirmed December 23 that Hamas had accepted a 24 hour "ceasefire" that went into effect the evening of December 22. Leithy said that Hamas and most other Palestinian factions had agreed to cease rocket fire into Israel, but that Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) had abstained. Leithy said it is possible that Hamas would agree to extend the ceasefire beyond the 24-hour period.

¶2. (C) Leithy said that there is evidence that Hamas leadership in Damascus had pressured Hamas leaders in Gaza (e.g. Mahmoud Zahar) to let the six-month "tahdiya" (calming) agreement with Israel lapse. In addition, he assessed that Hamas in Gaza may have felt pressure from other Palestinian factions to disavow the tahdiya in order to maintain credibility as a "resistance" organization. Leithy believes both Hamas and Israel will engage in "limited skirmishes" to satisfy their respective domestic political agendas over the short term. He acknowledged that the situation could escalate quickly, noting that the Egyptians believe Hamas now has more than 15,000 rockets stockpiled, including a much smaller, but undetermined, amount of "Grad" rockets capable of hitting the Israeli city of Ashkelon, and "a few" rockets that could reach Beer Sheva.
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